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MANUALS OF FRENCH WITH REFERENCE TO OVERSEAS SERVICE

III

The experiences of the past year have thrown much light on the problems connected with the teaching of French to the soldiers in our army. It is now fairly well understood what can be accomplished and what is useless to attempt. Educational work has been officially placed in the hands of the Y. M. C. A.; the recruiting of teachers and the methods of teaching have become systematized. During the coming winter it is likely that some of the difficulties of the situation will be less marked than they have been during the spring and summer. What is here said concerns only the teaching in the camps, without reference to the classes meeting under more normal conditions in colleges and schools.

To secure the advantages of uniformity, one of the French manuals already reviewed here was recommended for general use in the camps. Many teachers, however, found even this abbreviated course too long and too difficult, and others objected to one or another feature in the book. An entirely new manual has been prepared as the official text-book to be used by all Y. M. C. A. instructors in French. The compilers are men who have actually taught in the camps, and they have had the benefit of criticisms from many other teachers who have made use of various books. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the new manual will be acceptable to teachers who were not entirely satisfied with any of the books already published. It is limited in extent, simple but scientifically accurate in statement, emphasizing the forms of ordinary conversation, but introducing also a certain amount of military terminology. The pronunciation is indicated by accurate, easily learned, phonetic symbols. In order to avoid certain objectionable features in the symbols heretofore used, a system has been devised which is in part new. The wide use of the new manual will undoubtedly cause its system to supersede others, if, as seems certain, it proves in actual practice to be an improvement. The same symbols are to be introduced, it may

be added, in a revised edition of Wilkins and Coleman's "Army French," which will undoubtedly be widely used in regular college classes, and as a second book in camps where the classes continue beyond the time necessary to finish the manual adopted as a minimum. Among the other manuals already reviewed in these notes, those which have merit will continue to be useful as vocabularies of special subjects or as phrase-books. A number of others which have come to the notice of the reviewer may be mentioned here. Most of them are mere phrase-books, and in many of them the misuse of the term "phonetic" makes one's head swim. Only two or three attempt lessons in grammar.

A little book¹ issued by the Gordon-Detwiler Institute irritates by the extravagant claims put forth for it and by the inaccurate and unattractive way in which it is printed. It swarms with mistakes, from misprints to mistranslations; it lacks any systematic arrangement of the material; and its indication of the pronunciation is not only obscure and misleading, but different in different parts of the book. There is some treatment of the grammar, followed by military vocabularies and a list of trench slang; more or less useful information is, of course, contained in these word-lists. A most amusing mistake is *le directoire de la ville* for "the city directory" (p. 65). The reviewer cannot refrain from quoting a dialogue reported many years ago by *Punch*. An Englishwoman, wishing a directory of Paris, asks: "Avez-vous un directoire?" to which the puzzled Frenchman replies: "Non, Madame, nous avons une république à présent." We commend this to the attention of Mr. Detwiler in case he should revise the "Soldiers' French Course."

Two unpretentious pamphlets, prepared by instructors in two southern camps for use with their own classes, contain good material. The "Twelve Lessons" by Prof. Vernaelde² of Camp Johnston, contain words and phrases to be developed by the teacher, and would serve also as memoranda for the students; there is no treatment of the pronunciation. Mr. Palamountain's

¹Justice B. Detwiler, "Soldiers' French Course." New York, Gordon-Detwiler Institute, [1917]; pp. 203; price, \$1.50.

²Henri Vernaelde, Twelve Lessons of Conversational French for Enlisted Men. Jacksonville, Fla., Commission on Training Camp Activities; pp. 16; price, 10 cents.

French³ contains considerably more grammar, simply and clearly explained, and accurate representation of the pronunciation. The nasal vowels are unfortunately indicated by italics, as in some of the manuals previously reviewed. In some lessons the phonetic spelling alone is given, without the ordinary French spelling. The vocabulary is well chosen.

Mlle. Gaudel, who publishes her own "Ideal System for Acquiring a Practical Knowledge of French," has also issued a little book⁴ containing a series of word-lists, chiefly military; a good discussion of French pronunciation, which however would be puzzling to a beginner; a long "vocabulary of words in general use," and various useful tables. Many "fighters" would profit by the use of this book as a supplement to more systematic study of the language. The pronunciation is not indicated, except in the general rules given at the beginning.

The International College of Languages issues a conversational manual, "F. M. C."⁵ which could be heartily commended if it were not burdened with a peculiarly atrocious "phonetic pronunciation." Who would guess, for instance, that "pyŭ" represented *paille* (p. 14); "bē-yā," *billet* (on p. 14); given, however, as "bē-yeh" on p. 17); "bā-tō," *bateau* (p. 10)? *Voitures* is represented as "vō-ă-tures," *moi* as "mōō-ă," *Savoy* as "sā-vvvoi,"—all on the same page (p. 18)! *Prendre* is "pran," *temps* is "tahn"—both on p. 31. The phrases and word-lists, largely military in character, are well chosen and interesting. A folding map of the French front is included. A portion of the book can be had in the form of phonograph records.

A technical vocabulary for aviators, briefer than the one previously reviewed, comes from California.⁶ There are hints

³J. C. Palamountain, "French," a first course designed for use in American cantonments. Army Y. M. C. A., Camp McClellan, Alabama, 1918; pp. 43.

⁴V. D. Gaudel, "French for Fighters." New York, published by the author, 32 West 68th St., 1917; pp. 68; price, 50 cents. An edition is also distributed with the "Compliments of the Guaranty Trust Company."

⁵R. M. Millar and A. Tridon, F.M.C., "French Military Conversation, Speaking and Pronouncing Manual for the Use of the United States and British Army Forces." New York, International College of Languages, [1917]; pp. 157 (many blank for notes); price, \$1.25.

⁶G. Chinard and E. R. Hedrick, "Handbook of English and French Terms for the Use of Military Aviators." Berkeley, University of California Press, 1917; pp. 48.

on the pronunciation of vowels, but not of consonants; throughout the book the silent letters in the French words are printed in lighter-faced type—an expedient of little use. Each group of words is arranged alphabetically according to the English, the French equivalent following. No phrases are given—in fact, the aviator is advised to use single words, and not try to form sentences. After the technical word-lists there follows (pp. 32-48) a vocabulary of words of general use. Aviators unable to speak French would do well to have this handbook with them; and the technical terms, seemingly authoritative are given in convenient form. Two other publications for aviators may be mentioned: "The Aviators's Pocket Dictionary" and "Aviation Technical Dictionary."⁸ These both have French-English word-lists as well as English-French.

Relief workers will find French word-lists arranged with reference to their needs in two small booklets by Shaw Jeffrey⁹ and Ernest Perrin.¹⁰ The latter's "Hospital French" consists of questions and phrases in English and French, prepared under the auspices of the base hospital division, N. Y. county chapter of the American Red Cross, for use by doctors and nurses of the hospital units working in the base hospitals in France. The questions are arranged to permit in general the answer "yes" or "no," so that a doctor or nurse, ignorant of the patient's language, may be enabled to give him directions and obtain information from him; all of which is commendable, provided the doctor or nurse can pronounce the French phrases intelligibly. Helpful, but of course inadequate rules for pronunciation are given at the beginning. The phrases themselves are admirably arranged for their purpose, and this little booklet can be extremely valuable, especially to persons who have had what all hospital attendants should have, a course of French pronunciation under a competent teacher.

A number of booklets containing useful words and phrases, but all of them unsatisfactory in their treatment of the pronuncia-

⁷A. de Gramont de Guiche, "The Aviator's Pocket Dictionary and Table-talk," New York, Brentano's, 1918; pp. 120; price, \$1.

⁸John Lycett, "Aviation Technical Dictionary," Paris, Dunot & Pinat, 1918; pp. 182; price, fr. 6.

⁹Shaw Jeffrey, "Elementary French Words and Phrases for Red Cross Workers and the New Army," New York, Brentano's; price, 25 cents.

¹⁰Ernest Perrin, "Hospital French," New York, Dutton, [1917]; pp. 37.

tion, have had considerable vogue. In the camps of the Central Department, thousands of copies of the "Soldiers' French Phrase Book"¹¹ have been distributed gratis by a manufacturing company. The phrases are simple and well selected. The English is followed by the French equivalent, and this by the indication of pronunciation, the key to which is repeated at the foot of every page. The claim is made that "a few minutes study of the following sounds, which are indicated by letters similarly marked in the text, will make it possible for one unacquainted with the language to pronounce French words correctly." Comment is superfluous.

In the 5-and-10 cent stores and elsewhere, many copies have been sold of "Speak French."¹² Like the preceding booklet, it hides its authorship under anonymity. "We fully realize," says the preface, "that *onh* does not exactly represent the French nasal sounds of *on* and *an*, but neither does *anh*, nor *ang*, nor *ong*." How true! nevertheless, *faim*, is "phonetically" represented by "fanh," and *pain* by "penh;" why this discrimination? As a curiosity we may add "su-prrairm" for *suprême*. The general rules given (pp. 79-82) for pronouncing are fairly good, but the system of indicating the pronunciation is very bad. Need we insist that the only proper course, aside from *viva voce* instruction, is to explain the French sounds as well as may be, and to adopt a system of indicating them which is not based on so-called English equivalents? The vocabulary of "Speak French" is largely military.

Somewhat more pretentious, but equally amateurish and misleading in its treatment of the pronunciation, is "The American Soldier in France,"¹³ described as "a military guide-book to the French language, army and nation," the author having been an artillery officer in the French army. The book is divided into sections: special and technical vocabularies, practical dialogues, grammatical information, army slang, tables, etc. Much useful information about France and the French army is given, but on the linguistic side it cannot be recommended.

¹¹"The Soldiers' French Phrase Book," Chicago, Felt & Tarrant Mfg. Co., 1918; pp. 46.

¹²"Speak French," a book for the Soldiers. A complete vocabulary of military and common words, etc. Cleveland, the Goldsmith Publishing Co., [1917]; pp. 118; price, 10 cents.

¹³George Nestler Tricoche, "The American Soldier in France." Second edition. Morristown, N. J., 1917; pp. 106; price, 50 cents.

The Montant Method¹⁴ is described as an "emergency phrase-book with phonetic pronunciation," expressly compiled for men in the U. S. Army in France. It pronounces the name of this country "A-tah Zoo-nee," which is evidently to be taken as the author's idea of phonetic.

The "Oxford English and French Conversation Book"¹⁵ claims to be "a simple, accurate method that enables anyone to converse in French on all subjects." A book which would do that is surely cheap at any price. This one, however, is not essentially different from the others here mentioned. It contains words and phrases military, naval and aeronautical, with some simple treatment of the grammar.

Hernan's "What You Want to Say and How to Say it," published for beginners in various languages, is issued in a special war edition for French.¹⁶ Originally compiled for ordinary travelers, it was amplified by a vocabulary of military words and phrases to meet the requirements of the British forces, and thousands of copies have been given to soldiers in England. The material is well chosen and practical, so far as vocabulary is concerned. There is no grammar and no description of French sounds, but "the syllabification of the phonetic spelling accompanying each word makes easy correct pronunciation at a glance." For instance—"soo-fee' z-au (ng)'t," which somehow seems more than *suffisante*. A phonetic gem is "chew-nick" for *tunique*. Apparently, as Mr. Hernan observes, "nahm-port kwah fe-rah laugh-fare."

Many original devices are used in Dr. Rudy's "French Key,"¹⁷ which the author says, "unlocks French" for persons who are "without a good knowledge of French grammar." Ingenious as the book is, its usefulness to a person of no linguistic experience may be questioned. A long list of "word-endings," including many inflectional terminations of verbs, is followed (pp. 11-41)

¹⁴A. Montant, "The Montant Method"—New York, published by the author; pp. 51; price, 10 cents.

¹⁵R. Sherman Kidd and C. L. Cabot, "Oxford English and French Conversation Book for Army and Navy Men." Seventh edition. Boston, Oxford-Print, 1918; price, 35 cents.

¹⁶W. J. Hernan, "What You Want to Say and How to Say it in French." U. S. War Edition, special issue, [1917]; pp. 62; price, 25 cents.

¹⁷A. Rudy, "French Key for Soldiers and Sailors," San Antonio, Texas, published by the author, 1918; pp. 78; price, 25 cents.

by a French-English vocabulary, which contains "root-words" to which the endings are to be affixed, and also many separate verb-forms in their alphabetical place. Slang is given undue prominence by being printed in capitals. Then follow lists of cognates, an English-French vocabulary, and various hints for forming sentences. The author has promised a revised and enlarged edition.

The "International Conversation Book"¹⁸ contains two corresponding sections, English-French and English-German, bound together. A portion, but not all of it, is a reprint of W. M. Gallichan's "Soldiers' English-French Conversation Book," previously reviewed. A translation of the same into Italian has appeared, for the use of American soldiers in Italy; and with this publication these notes may be brought to a close. It is, of course, as desirable for our troops in Italy to have a command of the language of the country, as for our troops in France. There is an evident need for a brief manual to teach elementary Italian, both military and general; when it comes, let us hope that it will be as good in its way as the best of the French manuals, and worthy of a permanent place among the comparatively few text-books of Italian. Unfortunately, Miss Dickinson's¹⁹ adaptation is no better than its model. The word-lists will be useful, in default of better ones; the vocabulary of military operations and of ordinary conversation is fairly well treated. But aside from various misprints, the method of presenting the pronunciation is absurd and often misleading. Italian intonation is of course not easy to master; but reasonable correctness or at least intelligibility is not difficult. Miss Dickinson, however, makes it seem almost impossible. For one thing, she never indicates which syllable is to be accented; and the sound *a* is represented sometimes by "ah" sometimes by "ar." Such indications as "vo-lee-oh" for *voglio*, "arn-dee-ah-moh arl gal-lop-poh" for *andiamo al galoppo*, indicate how badly a comparatively easy piece of work has been done.

¹⁸"International Conversation Book," Philadelphia, Winston, [1917]; pp. 137 + 118; price, 35 cents.

¹⁹Ida Dickinson, "The Soldiers' English and Italian Conversation Book," translated and adapted from W. M. Gallichan's "Soldiers' English-French Conversation Book." Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1918; pp. 128; price, 30 cents.

The purpose of these notes has been to give a brief description of publications intended to teach French to the American forces before and after they are transported to Europe. It is hoped that certain principles have been demonstrated, and in particular the fact that some teachers who are doubtless successful with their classes fail utterly when they attempt to record in print for the use of others their methods of teaching. Pronunciation especially will be learned chiefly by imitation; injudicious attempts by unqualified persons to impart it, or by unprepared learners to acquire it, through the printed page alone, are certain to result in disappointment.

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